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ABSTRACT

A 1-year study of a New York suburban school district (3,200 students) examined what connections existed between regular education reform and special education. The school district had recently implemented building-level shared decision making teams as part of their efforts to reform education. The purpose of these teams was to develop goals for the district, such as having children attend school ready to learn, having academic goals that are appropriate for helping students enter the job market, and having safe and drug-free schools. Observation and interview data collected throughout the investigation indicate that the teams paid little attention to special education or students with disabilities. Educators working on reform in the district did not consider special education as a key component of the reform process and special educators knew little about these reforms. Findings indicate members of primary school teams were more likely than the middle school or high school team members to indicate that their team represented special education. However, simply having a special educator as a team member did not necessarily ensure special education would be discussed. The need for a team member with explicit responsibility for representing special education interests is urged. (Contains 54 references.) (CR)

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Is Special Education Forgotten in Educational Reform?

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Running Head: Special Education Forgotten

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Is Special Education Forgotten in Educational Reform?

Despite the focused attention of politicians, practitioners and general education theorists (e.g., Comer, 1980, National Goals 2000, Sizer, 1984) and concurrent efforts to restructure special education (Stainback & Stainback, 1984, Will, 1986), many advocacy, parent, and educational groups have become increasingly concerned that efforts to reform American education ignore special populations (e.g. National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 1992; Jenkins, Ronk, Schrag, Rude, & Stowitschek, 1994; Kaufman, Kameenui, Birman, & Danielson, 1990; Reynolds, Wang, & Walberg, 1987; Ysseldyke, et al., 1992).

Many observers believe that existing regular school programs are inadequately prepared to meet the challenges of the global marketplace (National Governor's Association, 1990), are perpetuating our "nation at risk" status (National Commission on Excellence, 1983), and are unable to meet the needs of increasing numbers of at-risk children (Committee for Economic Development, 1987). Response to these criticisms has resulted in local, state and national reform and restructuring efforts directed at general education. However, it has been suggested that this has occurred with only limited attention to populations of students with identified special education needs (Ysseldyke, Algozzine & Thurlow, 1992), and if this is correct, special education students may be inadvertently excluded from the training necessary to compete in the 21st century (NJCLD., 1992).

There have also been concerns expressed about the efficacy of special education (e.g. Algozzine, Morsink, & Algozzine, 1988; Reschly, 1988; Wang & Reynolds, 1985; Ysseldyke,

Thurlow, Graden, Wesson, Algozzine, & Deno, 1983). Researchers have diverse viewpoints about how to improve special education (Biklen & Zollers, 1987; Kauffman & Pullen, 1989; Zigmond, et al., 1995), and as a result a variety of approaches have been suggested for reforming special education. These have ranged from technical improvements in assessment and instruction (e.g. Deno, 1985), to the regular education initiative (Will, 1986) which seeks to educate students with special needs in regular education settings, to abolishing special education all together (Stainback & Stainback, 1984). While strategies such as the regular education initiative involve regular education teachers working with special education students, this and other approaches have been developed as reforms by and for special education rather than the entire educational system.

Obtaining input from diverse constituents like parents, community members, teachers, and special educators may be necessary to help schools meet current challenges (Goldman, Dunlap, & Conley, 1993). Shared decision making and site-based management strategies have been suggested as methods to obtain such input (Bergman, 1992; Goldman, Dunlap, & Conley, 1993; Hoy & Tarter, 1993; Lange, 1993). Proponents of involving such constituent groups cite the failure of large scale reform efforts that have paid little attention to the context and community of schools (Cuban, 1990; Sarason, 1991) and refer to successful management strategies used in the private sector that include all members of the organization in planning (e.g., Deming management method; Walton, 1988).

Participatory management efforts could provide an avenue for the meaningful representation of special education in reform efforts. Unfortunately, despite calls for integrated

regular and special education initiatives (Will, 1986) many special educators believe that they have been left out of the restructuring process and are operating in a parallel system (Johnson & Rusch, 1992; Sapon-Sevin, 1987; Ysseldyke, et al., 1992). Reform efforts that are directed either at regular education (e.g. National Commission on Excellence, 1983) or at special education alone may ignore the important connections between the two and remove a large percentage of the student population from opportunities to develop needed skills (Johnson & Rusch, 1992; NJCLD, 1992; Sapon-Sevin, 1987; Ysseldyke, et al., 1992).

Despite these beliefs about the lack of connection between regular education reform and special education, there is a lack of data on this topic. There is a striking need for research about the connections between general school reform and special education, particularly regarding participatory decision making initiatives (e.g. Fullan, 1985; Goldman, Dunlap, & Conley, 1993). Many position statements call for the substantive inclusion of special educators in the restructuring process (e.g., Kaufman, Kameenui, Birman, & Danielson, 1990; Kauffman, 1993; NJCLD, 1992; Will, 1986; Ysseldyke, et al., 1992) but very few empirically based studies exist that examine these linkages.

One exception is Jenkins, et al.(1994) who provided financial support and training for participatory decision making activities related to low achieving students in 12 schools. Survey and participant rating information about the perceptions of teachers, special educators and administrators regarding participatory decision making in the school reform process was collected. There were positive effects on regular and special educators' perceptions of the reform process and on their role in the decision making process regarding low achieving students.

Further, the teachers' perceptions of improved decision making were supported by student data indicating that more special education services were delivered in regular education settings with no deleterious effects on student achievement.

The breadth and multiple foci of this study (i.e., Jenkins, et. al., 1994) have general implications for reform efforts related to special populations. However, they were evaluating the impact of an intervention that was implemented by the researchers. We were unable to find any investigations that examine the process of restructuring implemented throughout a school district which focused on the perspectives of special education teachers and which was implemented by the district rather than researchers external to the system. Further, the contribution of special educators to regular education reform remains unknown. There is a need for long term, deep and detailed examinations of the process of shared decision making and the contributions of special educators. Despite Cuban's (1990) call for research that follows school reform over time, there have been no studies focused on this goal while considering the role of special education in the reform of regular education.

Johnson and Rusch (1992) reviewed the major general education restructuring position papers from 1983 to 1992 and found that, indeed, special education was addressed only on rare occasions and at the margins. They suggest that general education reformers have adopted the perspective that special education is a separate entity from regular education, removed from ongoing reform efforts. Further, we have been unable to locate research that sought to determine the ways in which special education was involved in general education reform. Research addressing the connections between regular education reform and special education is needed to

reach conclusions and develop strategies to maximize such connections. To address this question we collected observational information reflecting the ways in which special education is considered in educational reform efforts, how special education is represented on educational reform teams and the ways in which these efforts are communicated to special educators. If special education is considered in educational reform and if this is communicated to special educators then it is logical to assume that special educators would be informed about educational reform efforts. As a result, this research sought to determine the knowledge that special educators have of educational reform efforts based on interview data. In addition, since one purpose was to determine how those involved with reform consider special education, we sought to determine how educational reformers think about special education in the context of their reform efforts. As a result, this research used interviews to determine the beliefs that educational reformers have about how shared decision making teams consider special education and how they can influence special education.

The National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (i.e., NJCLD) offers one approach that can be used to integrate regular education reform efforts with special education (NJCLD, 1992). They have detailed a list of specific issues to be considered as those involved with special education (i.e., special educators, parents of students with special needs, etc.) participate in general educational reform efforts. These issues include questions about how special education is considered in the following eight areas: academic standards and student achievement; curriculum and instruction; accountability and evaluation (of students); school and classroom organization; locus of decision making; choice (of school); school finances; and personnel preparation. Four of

these categories are particularly relevant to the educational reform efforts implemented by the school district that was the focus of this research: academic standards and student achievement, curriculum and instruction, school and classroom organization, and locus of decision making. As a result, the present investigation examined the degree to which these four categories were reflected in the discussions of educational reform teams and the degree to which these discussions considered special education.

The present study substantially extends existing research by using prolonged, comprehensive, and intensive data collection permitting detailed descriptions of the educational reform process. Data include multiple interview sets with participating members of building reform teams, interviews of special education professionals, and systematic observations of building reform teams collected over the course of three years. These data and our prolonged, persistent engagement with district reform efforts at every level allow for a unique examination of the process of participatory school reform in relation to special education and the role of special education in restructuring efforts.

Purpose

Given the assumption that special education has not had an impact on regular education reform and the lack of research directly addressing this question, the primary purpose of this research was to determine what connections existed between regular education reform and special education in one school district whose educational reform efforts were examined systematically and intensively. The following questions were addressed.

1. How is special education represented on the building level shared decision making teams

(i.e., building reform teams) that engage in the district's efforts to reform education in each school?

a. Are there any special educators or parents of students with disabilities on these teams?

b. Does the team assign one of its members to represent special education as a constituent group? If so who?

c. Do members of the shared decision making team report that they represent special education as a constituent group?

2. How do Building reform team members and special educators from the district believe that special education is considered in the discussions of these teams?

3. Are the NJCLD categories of educational reform represented in the discussion topics of building reform teams and how is special education considered in these discussions?

4. What do special educators know about the Building reform team and what efforts did the Building reform teams make to communicate with special educators?

5. How do building reform team members believe that they can influence special education?

Methods

Research Design

This is a descriptive investigation of a suburban school district that employed a longitudinal recursive design which is reflected in Table 1. This design allowed for questions to evolve over time. As a result the interview questions were modified each year. This research used

a multi-source, multi-measure, multi-stage descriptive approach. The multiple sources included three building level shared decision making teams (i.e., building reform teams), and special education professionals from the district. The multiple measures included interviews and observations. The multiple stages of this research occurred over a three year period of time. The data collected from initial observations were used to help design the interviews conducted during that year. All of the data collected during the first year along with the observations from the second year were used to shape the interviews of building reform team members that were conducted at the end of the second year. Finally, special education professionals were interviewed at the end of the third year and the design of these interviews was informed by the data collected during the first two years of the study as well as the observations during all three years of this research.

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insert Table 1 about here

Context of the Study

The School District. The district under study is a small suburban school district located in the greater capital district of New York State. It includes four school buildings (primary elementary, intermediate elementary, middle, and high school). The enrollment in this district was approximately 3000 students. The student population was predominately white and middle class (11% of the districts' students received reduced priced or free lunches). According to the district's 1993 Comprehensive Assessment Report (CAR), the district's general achievement

(SAT scores are near the national average), attendance (greater than 92%), and high school completion (about 95%) were considered good. Further, approximately twelve percent of the district's population was comprised of students classified as educationally handicapped.

This school district had a history of being slow to implement special education practices that are commonly implemented by other school districts. For example, this district was slow to implement resource room classes and did not emphasize inclusion. While the district was in the process of attempting to implement changes in this area (including an increasing emphasis on inclusion), it had a long history of considering special education as separate from the rest of the educational system.

This school district had recently implemented shared decision making teams as a part of their efforts to reform education in the district using the National Goals 2000 (The White House, 1990) and the state wide New Compact for Learning (New York State Education Department, 1991). Based on National Goals 2000 the district formed district wide reform teams for each of the major goals associated with goals 2000. The purpose of these teams was to develop goals for the district associated with having children attend school ready to learn, having academic goals that are appropriate for helping children enter the job market in the 20th century, and having safe and drug free schools. Based on the New Compact for Learning every school in the state was charged with developing shared decision making teams that were responsible for developing methods of implementing the district's goals at each school.

Observation and interview data collected throughout this investigation suggested that the building level shared decision making teams (i.e., building reform teams) were the locus of

interface between special education and education reform in this district. In contrast, the district wide shared decision making teams did not address issues in a manner that had a direct effect on the implementation of special education in these schools. As a result, this research focused on the building level shared decision making teams (i.e., building reform teams) to determine the involvement of special education in this district's efforts to reform education.

The Schools. This district had four schools organized developmentally. The primary elementary school included grades K-2, the intermediate elementary school included grades 3-5, the middle school included grades 6-8, and the high school included grades 9-12. The shift to a developmental structure (i.e., primary and intermediate elementary schools as well as the middle school) occurred prior to the onset of this research, and these modifications resulted in considerable movement of staff to work in new buildings with new professional colleagues. This research focused on the building reform teams from three of these schools: Primary Elementary School, Middle School, and High School.

Involvement of the Researchers. Since 1992, the school district and researchers have been studying shared decision making and educational reform to determine the impact of education reform on students with disabilities. As a part of this research we have gathered data about the instruction provided to students with disabilities and the achievement of these students. The researchers have also worked as participant observers on many of the district's shared decision making teams and have interviewed a large number of educators to learn about their perceptions of the school reform process.

Sample

The present investigation examined two samples using interviews and observations of shared decision making teams to learn about how special education is considered in educational reform. The two samples used in this investigation included: (1) the members of building level shared decision making teams (building reform teams), and (2) special education professionals.

The Building Reform Teams. Building reform teams are building level shared decision making teams that were responsible for implementing the educational goals established by the district. The teams observed in this research included the teams from the primary elementary school, the middle school, and the high school. These teams were studied over a period of three years to determine if and how special education was considered in educational reform.

Building reform teams were comprised of the school principal, teachers, parents, and students, and there was a total of 34 team members distributed across these three teams in a given year(8 - 15 members per team) as noted in Table 2. It is noteworthy that a special educator was added to the primary school reform team in the third year to represent special education, and a school psychologist was added to the team during that year to represent special areas (See Table 2). However, both of these professionals frequently missed meetings during the third year. One member of the primary school team during years 1 and 2 was a remedial reading teacher. No special educators were members of the building reform team at the middle school. However, two to three members of the middle school team (e.g., a guidance counselor, nurse, and physical education teacher) were assigned the responsibility of representing the special area teachers which included counselors, school nurses, physical education teachers, music teachers, art teachers,

English as a second language teachers as well as special education teachers. Finally, one special educator was a member of the high school team. This teacher happened to serve as one of co-chairs of this building reform team. However, no member of this team (including the special education teacher) was assigned the responsibility of representing special education. None of the parent members of these teams was a parent of a student with disabilities.

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insert Table 2 about here

Special Education Professionals. Participants in this study also included 12 special education professionals in the district, including special education teachers, social workers, and speech and language specialists. Interviews of these special education professionals were conducted during the third year of this investigation.

Data Sources

An open-ended interview format was conducted with both samples over the course of this investigation. Although a large number of questions were asked in these interviews, this investigation reports information obtained from those questions that concerned perceptions of the relationships between school reform in the district and special education. Observations of the building reform teams were conducted for the entire three-year period of this investigation.

Interview: Year One (Building Reform Teams). An open-ended interview was conducted with selected building reform team members (n=12) in the first year of this investigation. The interview protocol consisted of a large pool of questions addressing educational reform efforts in

the district including some questions that directly addressed special education. The questions which addressed special education focused on special education representation on teams, special education and reform, and suggestions to improve special education and reform. The questions that were analyzed for the purposes of this research were focused on the connections between educational reform and special education and included the following:

1. What has reform done to influence special education?

2. How does the building reform team consider special education as it develops educational reforms?

Interview: Year Two (Building Reform Teams). An open-ended interview was conducted in year two. All of the building reform team members were interviewed (n=32). This interview asked a range of questions regarding general reform activities in the district. The questions analyzed for the purposes of this research contained information relevant to the connections between regular education reform and special education. The questions that were analyzed for the purposes of this research were as follows:

1. How does the building reform team consider special education as it develops reform?

2. To what extent do you represent students with disabilities on the building reform team? To what extent do you represent special education on the building reform team?

3. What suggestions do you have for ways in which the building reform team could help to implement special education?

Interview: Year Three (Special Education Professionals). An interview was conducted at the end of the third year to obtain information from special education professionals about their

perceptions of educational reform in this district. Twelve special education professionals were interviewed. The questions that were analyzed for the purposes of this research were focused on perceived connections between educational reform and special education. These included:

1. How does the building reform team consider special education as it develops reform?

2. To what extent does the team represent students with disabilities? Special education?

3. What do you know about the building reform team? Do you know what they do or who is on the team?

4. What suggestions do you have for how the building reform team can improve education for students with disabilities?

Interview Coding: Interrater Agreement. Responses to each of these interviews were categorized and coded using procedures developed previously (i.e., Meyers, Gelzheiser, Yelich, & Gallagher, 1990). Each question from each interview was scored independently by two raters and interrater agreement was consistently close to .90 (Year 1 Interview = .92; Year 2 Interview = .94; Year 3 Interview = .88). Each time there was a disagreement about a coding decision, the two researchers reached agreement to maximize accuracy.

Observations of Building Reform Teams: Years One, Two and Three. A key component of the methods was the use of participant-observers. Participant-observers worked as members and observers of each shared decision making team that was examined. This afforded an "insider's" perspective as the researchers became a part of each team. As a result, we were able to develop detailed understanding which was based on prolonged involvement with the teams as participant-observers for the three years of this research. This understanding was further enhanced because

the researchers had been involved with this district's educational reform efforts for one year prior to the beginning of this particular study.

Observations were conducted of all meetings held by the three building reform teams over a three-year period (i.e., 26 - 34 meetings per team; total = 93 observations; see Table 1). Two observers were present at these meetings and each meeting was recorded using an audio tape recorder and a conference microphone.

Field notes reflected the content of discussions and decision making as well as the degree to which special education was addressed at these meetings and these field notes were developed for all of the meetings of each team for the three year period of this research. These were based on artifacts from each meeting such as the meeting agenda, minutes and record of attendance as well as observations that were collected as follows. Graduate research assistants and participant-observers took narrative notes designed to characterize the discussions involving special education as well as the content and process of each meeting. After narrative observations were completed, the observers filled out a brief form summarizing the topics, decisions, and the involvement of team members. These forms were checked by the participant-observer and graduate research assistant on each team and agreement was reached on the information reported in these forms.

A sample of five meetings per team (one from the first year and two from the second and third years of observations) was transcribed to provide detailed information about the nature of discussions focused on special education and educational reform in these teams. Decisions were made about which meetings to transcribe by choosing representative meetings which met the

following criteria: 1) key team members were present at the meeting including the principal and chairpersons, and 2) the meeting focused on substantive topics which accurately reflected the overall focus of the team. The tape recordings for each of these 15 meetings (5 per team) were transcribed so that a line by line search of the meetings' discussions would reveal any discussions concerning special education and the educational reform categories from the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (1992).

This investigation used a computer search strategy using key words to identify discussions involving special education. These words included special, handicapped, disabled, at risk (at-risk), OT/PT (occupational therapy/physical therapy), CSE (Committee On Special Education), skills, and speech. Areas of the transcript that included these words were examined for relevance to special education. Exact references to special education were highlighted from the beginning of the complete statement until the end. Also, these transcripts were each read by one of the researchers to be sure that all discussions relevant to special education were found.

The transcripts were also read to discover connections between special education and reform by identifying the following four topics from the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (1992): academic standards and student achievement, curriculum and instruction, school and classroom organization, and locus of decision making. Topics were identified when they continued for at least 100 lines or when they were related to one of the four topics from the NJCLD. Those discussions that were related to housekeeping functions of the meetings such as deciding to begin the meeting were not identified as topics even when they were more than 100 lines so that only substantive topics were identified.

Approaches to Analysis

Each topic identified in the above manner was then examined to see if it contained discussion of special education. Inter-rater agreement was calculated for six transcripts (2 per team, 40% of the 15 transcripts). One of the participant observers from this research read each of these transcripts and coded them according to their focus on special education and their relevance to the topic criteria. Total inter-rater agreement (agreements/possible decisions) was 90% for topics, 87% for NJCLD categories, and 94% for special education discussion. Disagreements were resolved by reaching agreement between the raters and any changes resulting from this process were incorporated into subsequent analyses. Finally, lines of dialogue were tabulated for each transcript and the percent of the lines devoted to special education was calculated.

Summaries of each meeting and researcher memos were also examined to seek instances of discussions in the shared decision making teams that were relevant to special education. In addition, the interviews of each cohort (i.e., district goal team members, building planning team members, and special educators) were examined to find responses that described the connections between the district's regular education reform efforts and special education. Information from all of these sources was used to answer each of the research question.

Results

This investigation of the intersection of school reform and special education included multiple samples and multiple data sources collected over a three year period. Interview protocols that included open-ended questions and separate faculty cohorts were collected in each of the three years. All team meetings were observed throughout this three-year period yielding field

notes describing these meetings, and verbatim transcripts of five reform meetings per building were collected. These data were analyzed qualitatively for examples of team discussions and activities that included or involved special education, and for the perceptions of team members and special educators about the relationship of special education to the reform team process. The results present data relevant to the five research questions including illustrative examples from interviews and observations.

Research Question 1: Representation of special education on building reform teams

(a) Are there any special educators or parents of students with disabilities on the team and (b) does the team assign one of its members to represent special education as a constituent group? If so who? There are several ways that special education could be represented in building reform team discussions. Special educators might be standing members of the teams, representation could be assigned to a specific team member, people knowledgeable about special education (e.g., special educators, parents of students with disabilities) could be asked to attend particular meetings, or team members could be assigned to represent special education for designated tasks. Two other possibilities include informal representation when no one is assigned the duty but there is indication that a member interacts with a special education teacher or parent (e.g., in the faculty room) or has some undetermined notion of special education, or by chance, when a team member just happens to mention something related to special education.

Findings concerning the membership of special educators on these teams are presented in Table 2 in the Participants section of the Methods. The middle school team did not have a special education member on the team during the period of this research. The primary school did not have

a special educator on the team during the first two years, however, a special education teacher and a school psychologist were added to the team during the third year. The high school team did have a special education teacher/member who served as team leader during the first two years of this research, but special education was not represented directly during the third year.

Assigned representation is also described in the participants section of this paper. The middle school and primary school teams both assigned a member (or two) to the team to represent the special areas, which included special education (and gym, school nurse, guidance, remedial, etc.), as a constituent group. While this role was generally not filled by a special education teacher, a school psychologist and a special education teacher did serve this role on the primary school team in year 3. No members of the high school team were assigned the responsibility for representing special education including the special education teacher who was on this team in years 1 and 2.

Observational data were used to describe the other representation possibilities described in the prior paragraph. There is no evidence in either the transcribed meetings or the summaries of non-transcribed meetings that non-team members who were special educators attended team meetings for the specific purpose of discussing an identified topic and representing special education in that discussion. Neither were parents of students in special education ever so represented.

There is evidence that on occasion the primary school team assigned members to represent special education for certain specific tasks. A large portion of the discussion at one meeting was devoted to a survey of student needs for which specific team members were assigned to collect

data from special educators (e.g., special education teachers, speech and language specialists, occupational and physical therapists). Information about enrollment in various special programs and the overlap between them was collected and presented to the team. Interestingly, the special area representative was not the person assigned to collect information from special education sources.

Informal and chance representation of special education were observed in the meetings on several occasions. For example, the administrators in this district often explained that special education is part of a continuum of student services and is necessarily an important part of all discussions concerning education, curriculum and instruction, and educational reform. There is some evidence that this philosophy was expressed informally on occasion. In one reform team discussion about reading achievement at the middle school, the principal said the team needed to consider special education students. Chance representation was also evident in some middle school and primary school meetings. For example, in one report about a discipline program under consideration a team member mentioned cursorily that this program had a special education component. Informal representation and chance mention of special education occurred solely as isolated events in the meetings. There is no evidence from the transcripts or observations that a substantive discussion of special education took place following either an informal representation or a chance mention of special education.

(c) Is special education a constituent group represented by building reform team members? Building reform team members and special educators were interviewed to obtain additional information about the degree to which special education was represented in the

discussions of the teams. Data addressing this question were gathered in an interview of all building reform team members at the end of Year Two and special educators from these three schools at the end of Year Three.

Table 3 reports the interview results from building reform team members pertinent to the representation of special education. One fourth of the respondents indicated that they represented students with disabilities, although members of the primary school team accounted for most of these responses. Many of the primary school team members said that they represented all students in the school, including those with educational disabilities. For example, one team member stated: "I think I represent all of the students in the building, all of the parents in the building...and certainly we're talking about improving results for kids, we're talking about improving results for all kids. Kids with handicapping conditions and kids without them." Another stated: "I represent those students I work with and I have special education students in my class." In addition, some primary school team members felt that they represent students with disabilities explicitly.

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insert Table 3 about here

In contrast, many reform team respondents acknowledged the lack of representation for students with disabilities on these teams. Almost half of the respondents indicated that these students were not represented and one fourth lacked a clear understanding about who represented children in special education. Such answers were particularly characteristic of members of the high school and middle school reform teams. Over half of the high school reform team members

reported there was no representation of students with disabilities, and substantial numbers of middle school reform team members either reported that they did not represent these children or that they were unclear about representation. Team members were also asked to report about their representation of special education as a discipline in reform team discussions. Few respondents at any of the schools indicated that they represented special education in this way.

Special education professionals were asked about whether students with disabilities were represented at the Building reform team in their school. These results are reported in Table 4. A substantial number of these respondents indicated that the building reform team represented students with disabilities. However, many of these positive responses did not suggest detailed knowledge. Some of these affirmative responses were as follows. "It is fair representation but because there are so few of us, we probably have less representation than the regular education type students." "I think they do a good job representing students who are in special education." "Just barely, but we only have three special education teachers at this school." Additionally, an equal number of respondents either indicated that the team did not represent students with disabilities or that they did no know whether it did. For example, in response to the question about the team representing students with disabilities, one teacher said: "Not at all." And, another teacher stated: "The child study team takes care of students with disabilities, not the building reform team."

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insert Table 4 about here

Two thirds of the special educators reported that the special education system was represented at their school's Building reform team. The following are some sample responses. "We can see building reform team members and have our concerns addressed that way. Even though we are not presently on the team we are not overlooked." "We're moving toward inclusion." However, some of these responses lacked sufficient detail to suggest that the respondent actually new a great deal about how special education was represented by these teams. These vague positive responses were as follows: "I think there are people on the team from special education." "I'm assuming their concerns are addressed." The remainder of the respondents either indicated that the team did not represent special education or they did not know whether the team had such representation. For example, one such respondent stated: "I don't think special education is represented, there is not a person (i.e., from special education) on the committee."

Research Question 2: How do Building Reform Team members and special educators from the district believe that special education is considered in the discussions of these teams?

The three interview samples were asked to indicate how their school's building reform team considered special education as it developed educational reforms. Categories of responses addressing this research question are reported in Table 5.

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insert Table 5 about here

Negative reports indicating that special education was not considered as a part of the

building reform team discussions characterized the most frequent responses from the two samples of building reform team members. For example, one respondent indicated: "Nothing yet, I didn't see it." Another respondent indicated: "I'm not sure that the team is keeping special education students in mind." Further, when Building reform team respondents indicated that special education was considered by their team, they most often talked about systemic discussions that might imply Special Education without mentioning the topic specifically. Examples of this type of response were as follows: "The mission statement applies to special education students..."; "Special education is always in mind because team members are remedial or special educators..."; and "The team represents the whole community...".

In year two a substantial number of team members, all from the primary school, indicated that data collection efforts included special education. The Primary School Team collected information about the number of children receiving various special services and the overlap between these services. "We're collecting data about the number of children receiving different services and how much overlap there is and trying to make comparisons."

Responses from special educators interviewed in year three differed somewhat from the building reform team members. Few reported negative perceptions about under representation or no representation of special education in reform team considerations. However, half of these respondents indicated that they did not know whether special education was considered by the building reform team at their school.

Research Question 3: Are the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities categories represented in the discussion topics of reform teams and is special education considered in these discussions?

(a) Are the NJCLD categories represented in the discussions of Building Reform Teams? Table 6 presents the data for building reform team topics, NJCLD identified topic categories, and topics that include special education in the discussion. It is apparent that all three teams frequently discussed matters that the NJCLD recommends as educational reform topics that should be addressed in relationship to special education. In fact, Table 6 shows that most of the topics that were discussed in the transcribed meetings from each school's shared decision making team were related to the categories of educational reform developed by the NJCLD.

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insert Table 6 about here

(b) How is special education considered in the discussions of the NJCLD categories? In contrast to the frequent occurrence of NJCLD identified topics at these meetings, Table 6 indicates that special education was rarely included in these discussions, particularly at the middle and high schools. In the transcribed meetings from the high school, special education was represented in only one meeting when discussions that included NJCLD categories took place. At the middle school, special education was mentioned briefly at two meetings. On one of these occasions this occurred in the context of a report to the team where the school psychologist was among those identified as being a member of the child study team. On the other such occasion, it

was noted that a discipline program under discussion included a special education component.

The primary school exhibited considerably greater attention to special education when the NJCLD topics were discussed. In fact, Table 6 reveals that at two of this team's transcribed meetings special education was mentioned during the deliberations of most of the NJCLD topics that were considered (e.g., 3 of 4 topics; 3 of 5 topics). These topics included special educator membership on a project team studying developmentally appropriate education, using a specific reading test for identifying students at-risk, collecting data from special educators about enrollment and overlap in special programs, and procedures for making referrals to special services.

The degree to which special education was considered at the meetings may be described more precisely in terms of the percentage of lines of dialogue from the transcript that directly address special education. Figure 1 presents these data for the teams over the first three years of this research. The absence of discussions about special education at the middle and high school teams is clear in this figure. Special education was mentioned in only 42 lines of dialogue for both of these teams and only in the superficial way described above. In the one high school meeting which included substantial mention of special education, more than half of this discussion (14 of 27 transcript lines) was attributed to one of our researchers describing this project. The primary school considered special education more frequently, especially in the two meetings where there were discussions of data collected from special educators and of procedures for making referrals to special services (25% and 6%). Special education was discussed 1% or less in the remaining three meetings of the primary team.

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insert Figure 1 about here

Research Question 4: What do special educators know about the Building Reform Team and what efforts did the Building Reform Teams make to communicate with special educators?

During the third year of this research special education professionals from each school were asked what they knew about the building reform team in their school including what the team did and who was on it. The categories of responses obtained in response to this question are reported in Table 7. Results indicate that the special education professionals did not know very much about the building reform team. Two of the twelve special educators interviewed indicated that they did not know anything about the team and another four gave a vague response indicating that they knew of the team's existence but that they did not have specific knowledge about the team, team members or its function. For example, one respondent stated: "I just know there is a team and that they meet periodically. They discuss different issues that they want to change." Another person giving this sort of response said: "Not a whole lot. Like I've caught part of conversations about planning for this and planning for that, Goals 2000, but nothing concrete. I'm not on any of these committees.....so any of the specifics I couldn't tell."

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insert Table 7 about here

Although most special educators appeared to know relatively little about their building

reform teams, interview responses suggested that there were some efforts to communicate what was happening at meetings. A few (three of twelve) of the special education professionals indicated that they were informed about their school's reform team activities through the distribution of monthly minutes and by reports at faculty meetings.

Meeting transcripts and observer notes from all of the meetings at these schools confirm that efforts were made to communicate reform team activities to constituent groups. For example, at the high school, representatives from the team were members of the faculty scheduling committee and were asked to report results to that group. At the middle school, team members represented assigned constituent groups and were asked to report to their groups and bring results back to the reform team. Notices were posted in the primary school newsletter regarding team and team membership activities. These are only representative communication techniques. All of the schools exhibited various efforts to communicate to their constituent groups.

Research Question 5: How do building reform team members and special educators believe that the teams can influence special education?

This research question was addressed by the following interview question that was asked of Building reform team members at the end of year two and of special educators at the end of year three: What suggestions do you have for how the building reform team can improve education for students with disabilities? Table 8 presents the response categories derived from this question.

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insert Table 8 about here

Nearly half of the building reform team members recommended that their team needed more input from special education teachers. For instance, one member said, "First step is to get someone from that portion of the faculty represented on the BRT." A number of the BRT members suggested that increasing faculty and program resources devoted to special education was an important way for the team to influence special education: "Ensure fair allocation of special education resources to all those involved...ensure there is enough special education teachers, programs, ...". A few respondents indicated that there was a need for joint efforts between special and regular education to improve services for students with special needs. Some members responded that building reform teams needed to increase their awareness of special education to influence reform efforts with effective consideration of special education. Some members also suggested that the reform teams could collect data on special education programs in their schools.

The special educators interviewed made some suggestions that overlapped with those made by the Building reform team members. Four of the twelve special educators suggested that increased training was needed to educate the faculty about special education. This was congruent with responses made by a small number of building reform team members indicating a need for increased awareness about special education. Also, three of the twelve special educators suggested that more special education staff and services were needed. This is similar to responses

from building reform team members indicating the need for more resources. Two special educators suggested that reform teams focus on inclusion as a way to influence special education. None of the building reform team members mentioned this possibility. This suggestion was not made by any of the building reform team members. Examples of these suggestions are as follows: "Teachers need to be more aware of inclusion and what that means. How could speech pathologists and special education teachers help with inclusion. We need to clarify definitions of inclusion." "I think some of the people on the team and some of the teachers need to be more educated about special education...". "I think more needs to be done in terms of understanding and tolerance. I think when kids are young they are pretty tolerant but as they get older even elementary school kids can be cruel."

Transcripts and observations of the building reform team meetings give no direct indications that these teams attempted to influence special education. Indirect attempts are evident on rare occasions, related to the classification of students as educationally handicapped. For example, the primary school team discussed when to conduct a school wide screening for reading problems. Part of that discussion centered on when the screening could take place to best take advantage of the special education referral process and the length of time between referral and placement.

Discussion

While prior literature has claimed that special education is not given much consideration during regular education reform (e.g., Kaufman, Kameenui, Birman, & Danielson, 1990; Ysseldyke, Algozzine, & Thurlow, 1992), this investigation is important because it is one of the

first to provide systematic data confirming this supposition. The building level shared decision making teams examined in this research generally paid little attention to special education or students with disabilities.

These findings can be considered within the context of prior suggestions that comprehensive and systemic approaches to reform would be most likely to integrate special education with regular education reform efforts (i.e., Pugach & Shapon-Shevin, 1987). However, the approaches to educational reform studied in this research were both comprehensive and systemic in nature as they used National Goals 2000 in an effort to focus the reform efforts throughout the district. Moreover, the presence of a team of researchers throughout these reform efforts may have also increased the likelihood that special education would receive attention. Despite these factors, many educators working on reform in this district did not consider special education as a key component of the reform process and special educators knew little about these reforms. Comprehensive and systemic reform efforts alone may not be sufficient for including special education. In addition, there is a need for specifically structured procedures designed to ensure that special education is given meaningful consideration within educational reform efforts.

One potentially important finding in this investigation was that the efforts to consider special education and communicate with special education constituent groups differed across schools. The primary school was most effective at representing special education within the process of school reform. The members of the primary school team were more likely than the middle school or high school team members to indicate that their team represented special education. Moreover, there appeared to be a connection between this cognition (i.e., that a role of

the team is to represent special education) and the behaviors of these teams, as the primary school team engaged in the most substantive discussions about special education. This suggests the potential importance of considering the cognitions of reform team members and of providing training and support to modify such cognitions in an effort to influence the implementation of school reform (e.g., Vygotsky, 1978). Future research in this area might focus productively on the impact that team and member cognitions have on reform activities as well as on the differential findings based on school level (i.e., elementary vs. secondary).

These data are noteworthy because they provide some new information about how one school district attempted to include special education in the discussions of its educational reform teams. This may have useful implications for future efforts designed to create approaches to educational reform that integrate ideas and practices from regular and special education in an effort to maximize the efficacy of the entire educational system.

The present data suggest that one critical factor relates to the ways that special educators are represented on educational reform teams. While the teams observed in this investigation only occasionally used effective approaches to represent special educators on shared decision making teams, these data have implications for effective approaches. It was found that both the primary and middle schools had a teacher member assigned to represent the special area teachers on the shared decision making team. Special area teachers included special education teachers as well as other groups such as music, art, physical education, guidance, etc. While these team members may have been responsible to represent the views of special area teams, the data presented in this report imply that this did not result in effective systematic efforts to represent the interests of

special education teachers. As a result, there was minimal discussion of special education and special educators had minimal knowledge about the shared decision making team in their building. The results suggest, further, that simply having a special educator as a team member will not necessarily overcome this problem. For example, the high school team had a special educator as a team member but ignored special education consistently. These results suggest that it may be necessary to have a team member with the explicit responsibility for representing special education on the shared decision making team, and given the interview responses which suggested the need for input from special educators, it is likely that the efficacy of such representation would be enhanced if this team member was a special educator.

In the current investigation it was also found that one effective approach to representation is when various team members are assigned the responsibility of representing special education for particular tasks. This approach was used with some effectiveness by the primary school team where team members were asked to collect information from special educators regarding enrollment in and overlap between various special education programs. This resulted in a discussion held by the primary team in which these aspects of special education constituted 25% of the dialogue at the meeting.

Interviews of team members suggested that while few team members were assigned responsibility for directly representing special education on the team, several members felt that they did represent special education. For example, a number of primary team members indicated that they represent special education on their team because they taught students with disabilities in various mainstream settings. Also, members from all teams indicated that they represented special

education to the extent that students with disabilities are considered by the district as a part of the continuum of services for students in the district and because the reform efforts were viewed as attending to all students (including those with disabilities). Given other data suggesting the minimal consideration actually given to special education by these teams, it appears that these approaches to representing special education as a part of the entire system did not work, and this may provide added support for approaches, such as those noted in the prior paragraph, which provide structures designed to represent explicitly the views of those involved with special education.

While many of the members of shared decision making teams did not feel that special education was represented on the teams or that it was a component of team discussions, many special educators who were not team members, did feel that special education was represented on these teams. However, this may have reflected the special educators' lack of knowledge about these teams as responses to other questions indicated that special educators did not know whether special education was discussed at team meetings. This lack of information about the teams by special educators provides further evidence that the teams were relatively ineffective at representing the views of special educators or communicating with this constituent group.

Observation data provided clear evidence that each of these teams discussed educational reform topics from the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (1992) which are clearly relevant to special education. These observed topics of discussion were related to academic standards and student achievement, curriculum and instruction, school and classroom organization, and locus of decision making. However, when these topics were discussed their

relevance to special education was generally not considered and the dialogue at these meetings rarely addressed special education. As noted during the results, the major exception to this trend occurred at two of five transcribed meetings of the primary school. Importantly, throughout these observations there were no discussions where there was an opportunity for special education and the views of special educators to have an impact on the curriculum and instruction in regular education. For this to occur there is a need for greater awareness by general educators concerning special education and there is a need for more systematic input from special educators.

One potential explanation for the relative lack of attention to special education during reform may be that few special educators are members of reform teams and general education teachers have only limited knowledge about special education. This is a question that merits future research. However, one relevant study conducted with members of the district wide educational reform teams from this research found that these educators were relatively knowledgeable about mild disabilities (Kelly, 1995). If future research confirms these findings then knowledge may not be the key issue, and instead, it may be necessary to conduct research that considers strategies that maximize the probability that educators will use their knowledge.

The design of this research which relied on multiple samples and multiple data sources helped to increase confidence in these results. This is particularly true since often the results across these different approaches were mutually confirming. However, there were occasions when the results were not consistent across samples or across methods. For example, the views of reform team members were not always consistent with the views of special educators as special educators were more likely to believe that special education was represented by building reform

teams than the members of these teams. As noted earlier, an examination of all of the data suggest that this discrepancy occurred as a result of the limited knowledge special educators had of the building reform teams. These sorts of conflicting findings helped to enrich our understanding of the relationships between reform and special education

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Table 1. Timeline and sources of data collection

School Year

	1993-1994	1994-1995	1995-1996
DATA SOURCE			
Interviews			
Building Reform Teams	n=12[a]	n=32[b]	
Special Educators			n=12[c]
Observations of Building Reforms Teams			
Total # Observations	n=29	n=30	n=27
Transcribed Observations[d]	n=1	n=2	n=2

[a] Interview protocol one.
[b] Interview protocol two.
[c] Interview protocol three.
[d] Meetings transcribed, topics identified, and special education involvement recorded.

Table 2. Building Reform Team membership by school and year

School	Admins	Reg. Educator	Parents	Students	Remedial Teachers	Special Area/e.g. guidance	Special Educator	Others	Total
Primary									
93-94	1	7	2	0	1	0	0	1	12
94-95	1	6	2	0	1	0	0	0	10
95-96	1	6	3	0	0	1	1	0	12
Middle									
93-94	2	5	2	0	0	3	0	0	12
94-95	2	8	2	0	0	3	0	0	15
95-96	1	9	2	0	0	2	0	0	14
High									
93-94	1	4	2	2	0	0	1	0	10
94-95	1	3	2	2	0	0	1	0	9
95-96	1	3	2	2	0	0	0	0	8

[a]custodian

Table 3
Building Reform Team Members Views of their Representation of Students with Disabilities and Special Education

	Elementary	Middle	High School	Total
	n= 9	n=13	n=10	n=32
	Freq (Percent)	Freq(Percent)	Freq(Percent)	Freq(Percent)
Students with Disabilities[1]				
Yes-Represented	5(56)	2(15)	1(10)	8(25)
Not Represented	3(33)	6(46)	6(60)	15(47)
Unclear Representation	1(11)	5(38)	2(20)	8(25)
Special Education[2]				
Yes-Represented	2(22)	1(8)	0(0)	3(9)
Not Represented	6(67)	5(38)	4(40)	15(47)
Unclear Representation	1(11)	4(31)	1(10)	6(19)

[1] Question from BRT interview 94/95: To what extent do you feel that you represent students with Disabilities on the BRT?

[2] Question from BRT interview 94/95: To what extent do you feel that you represent Special Education on the BRT?

Table 4

Special Education Professionals Views Concerning the Representation of Students with Disabilities and Special Education on the Building Reform Team

	Elementary	Middle	High School	Total
	n= 4	n=4	n=4	n=12
Responses	Freq (Percent)	Freq(Percent)	Freq(Percent)	Freq(Percent)
Students with Disabilities[1]				
Slightly Represented	2 (50)	2 (50)	0 (0)	4(33)
Represented	0(0)	0(0)	2(50)	2(17)
Not Represented	1(25)	1(25)	1(25)	3(25)
Don't Know	1(25)	0(0)	1(25)	2(17)
Special Education[2]				
Slightly Represented	1(25)	0(0)	1(25)	2(17)
Represented-General	1(25)	1(25)	2(50)	4(33)
Represented-Specific	1(25)	1(25)	0(0)	2(17)
Not Represented	1(25)	2(50)	0(0)	3(25)
Don't Know	0(0)	1(25)	0(0)	1(8)

[1] Question taken from the Special Education interview 95/96: To what extent do you feel the BRT represents students with disabilities?

[2] Question taken from the Special Education interview 95/96: To what extent do you feel the BRT represents special education?

Table 5
How Does the Building Reform Team Consider Special Education

	Year One	Year Two	Year Three
	BRT 93/94 n=11	BRT 94/95 n=32	SE 95/96 n=12
Responses	**Freq(Percent)**	**Freq(Percent)**	**Freq(Percent)**
Building Reform Team Interview 1993-1994[1]			
SE as Part of the Continuum	1 (9)		
Mission Statement	3 (27)		
Negative Response	6 (56)		
Building Reform Team Interview 1994-1995[2]			
Vague/General		2 (6)	
Data Collection		6 (19)	
BRT Works w/SE Teachers		1 (3)	
BRT Guides Special Project Teams		4 (13)	
BRT Members Work w/SE Students		3 (9)	
Negative Response		17 (53)	
Special Education Interview 1995-1996[3]			
BPT goes to SE teachers w/Questions and concerns			1 (8)
Through Language Arts Committee			1 (8)
Authentic Assessment			1 (8)
LRE Approach w/Children before placing them into SE			1 (8)
Looking to Identify Students at Risk			1 (8)

Table 5 continued

Ninth Grade Inclusion Program for English and Social Studies	1 (8)
Special Education Teacher on Special project Teams	1 (8)
Don't Know	6 (50)
Negative Response	1 (8)

[1] *Question taken from Building Reform Team interview 93/94* What has the the reform team done to impact special education?

[2] *Question taken from Building Reform Team interview 94/95* How does BRT consider special education as it develops reform?

[3] *Question taken from Special Education interview 95/96* In what ways has the BRT considered special education as it has developed ideas about educational reform?

Table 6

Building reform team topics, NJCLD categories and special education representation

	total topics	NJCLD areas		SpEd discussed	
Primary School					
1/94	5	5	100%	0	0%
10/94	6	2	33%	1	17%
4/95	5	4	80%	3	60%
11/95	5	5	100%	3	60%
4/96	6	6	100%	2	33%
subtotal	**27**	**22**	**81%**	**9**	**33%**
Middle School					
1/94	9	5	56%	2	22%
9/94	2	1	50%	0	0%
3/95	6	4	67%	2	33%
12/95	4	4	100%	0	0%
2/96	5	5	100%	0	0%
subtotal	**26**	**19**	**73%**	**4**	**15%**
High School					
10/93	10	6	60%	0	0%
11/94	4	4	100%	2	50%
3/95	9	8	89%	0	0%
11/95	7	7	100%	0	0%
5/96	3	3	100%	0	0%
subtotal	**33**	**28**	**85%**	**2**	**6%**
Overall total	86	69	80%	15	17%

Table 7
Special Educators Knowledge of the Building Reform Team

	Special Educators 95/96 (n=12)
Responses	**Freq(Percent)**
Knowledge of the Building Reform Team'	
[illegible]	2 (17)
Set up to improve the curriculum, discipline, and social aspects in the school system	2 (17)
They have leadership role in educational reform	1 (8)
I may access by monthly minutes and faculty meetings	3 (25)
Vague response indicating knowledge of the team	4 (33)
Solves problems taking place in the building	1 (8)
[illegible]	1 (8)
All are welcome to come	1 (8)
Gets representatives for grade levels and special education on the team	1 (8)
Don't Know	2 (17)

' Question taken Special Education interview 95/96: What do you know about the SBRT at your school? Do you know what they do or who is on it?

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Table 8

Building Reform Team and Special Education Members' Suggestions About the Influence of Reform on Special Education

	Year Two BRT Members [illegible]	Year Three Special Educators 95/96
Responses	*Freq/Percent*	*Freq/Percent*
Suggestions 1994-1995 Building Reform Team[1]		
[illegible]	[illegible]	
[illegible]	[illegible]	
[illegible]	[illegible]	
[illegible]	[illegible]	
[illegible]	[illegible]	
[illegible]	[illegible]	
[illegible]	[illegible]	
[illegible]	[illegible]	
[illegible]	[illegible]	
[illegible]	[illegible]	
Suggestions 1995-1996 Special Education[2]		
[illegible]		[illegible]
[illegible]		[illegible]
[illegible]		[illegible]
[illegible]		[illegible]

[1]Question taken from BRT manual 94/95. What suggestions do you have for ways in which the BRT could help to improve special education at your school?

[2]Question taken from SE manual 95/96. What suggestions do you have for how the BRT can improve education for students with disabilities at your school?

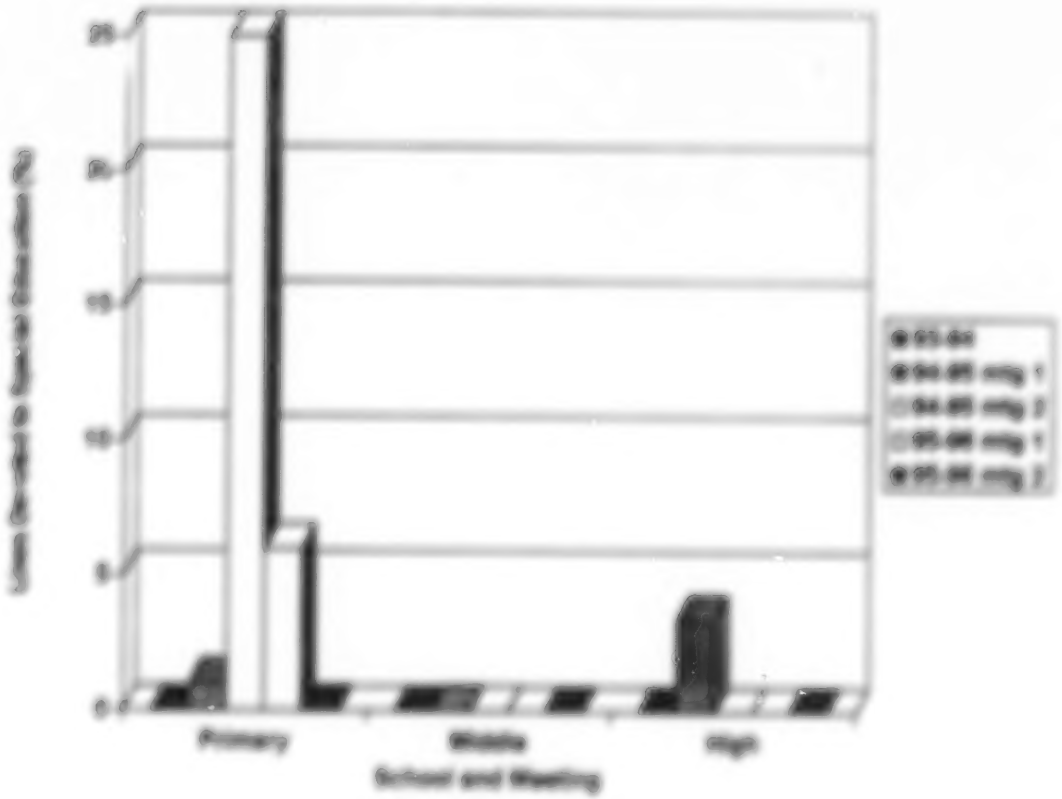

Figure 1. Percent of total transcript lines devoted to direct discussion of special education and related topics.